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The hometown newspaper of Stan Jongbloed, Watertown, S.D.

BANQUET AND AUGTION

IS FRIDAY

Busy night at City Hall with equalization and full agenda

The third Monday of March is the annual time for the equalization meeting. Monday, March 21 was the Board of Equalization meeting in Clark.

Seven appeals were heard, and lower valuations were accepted by the Equalization Board following discussion, and now these appeals will move on to the county level in the appeal process.

In South Dakota, and specifically Clark County, valuations have risen so that now all non-ag property is within eighty-five percent of full and true value.

Those who were appealing Monday were Kerry Kline, Chelsi Paulson, Dan Whalen, Ryan Easthouse, Joe Herr, Jerome and Melissa Nesheim, and Jason and Kylie Steen.

In these cases, those appealing felt that valuations have risen significantly and not necessarily fair-

City attorney Chad Fjelland reminded the appellants that appraisals from 2020 to today have gone up significantly.

Following the Board of Equalization meeting, the Clark City Council dealt with multiple important agenda items.

Choose Clark County Housing Project was first to be highlighted. Executive Director Kristin Vandersnick explained to the council that Choose Clark County is very interested in housing development.

The corner lot at S. Cloud St. and 7th Ave. S.E. is the lot that could be a potential lot for a Governor's House, a stick built house or a pre-built house.

cil that this southeastern Clark know by the April 4 meeting how lot should be gifted to the Choose Clark County group for housing development. At the April 4 council meeting it will be decided by the council whether \$1,500 should be asked for or should the lot be gifted to the group.

Jeremey Wellnitz, Chief of Police in Clark, asked the council to approve a Highway Safety Grant for overtime. The duration of this grant is dependent upon the federal government. It was approved unanimously.

The Clark American Legion Post #60 is looking at placing a Retired Flags Vault at Flat Iron Park. Legion member Dave Adam asked the council for approval to construct and asked if the council would be willing to split the costs.

The city granted permission to move ahead with this project and would like to see a formal monetary number from the Legion.

The South Dakota State Legislature approved over \$600,000,000 worth of water projects in Pierre recently.

Clark was asking for \$12,245,000 to do the entire city with new piping. The Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) approved \$8,018,070 for the city's water project. That means that roughly \$4 million will be in grant

Preliminary discussion by finance officer Alaina Wellnitz suggested that as this project unfolds, incrementally the water bill will increase from \$43 to \$53 and eventu-

Mayor Kerry Kline told the counally to \$63 per month. The city will much the city will receive in grant form for the city water project. The city is looking at doing the south side of town, and meter replacement, with this DANR money.

This amount of money is a wonderful, one-time federal grant of \$4,000,000.

The 2022 Clark City dump fees was the last item discussed by the council. Dump prices, generally speaking, will double or triple, regarding the item. The council approved dump rates with Brandon Kottke and Shane Hagstrom voting against the motion. In favor of the proposed fees are Nick Dalton, Melissa Nesheim and Andrew Zemlicka. Derrick Dohmann was absent. The council has quite a dilemma as last year the dump-site was \$17,000 in the red and the dump is basically full.

As the dump gets closer to opening for the year, more specific, detailed information will be available.

WEATHER

Robert Cole - Official Weather Observer

HI	LO	PR
March 15 43	26	0
March 16 61	32	0
March 17 61	30	0
March 1853	25	0
March 19 55	25	0
March 20 56	24	0
March 21 65	31	0
2022 precipitation to	date	0.63
2021 precipitation to	date	2.00

Gunnar Kvistad's education will continue at Colorado Springs, Colo.

Last Tuesday, United States Senator Mike Rounds called Clark High School senior Gunnar Kvistad. The following day, Wednesday, U.S. Senator John Thune and U.S. House of Representative member Dusty Johnson called Kvistad.

All three Congressmen had the same message: "We are honored to tell you that you've been accepted into the Class of 2026 at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. You have been selected on behalf of the U.S. Congressmen.'

This year there were 9,700 applicants for the United States Air Force Academy. Only 1,200 were accepted. Rigorous academic and physical requirements allow only a few to qualify and be selected. Kvistad said he had to do 200 pull ups, 200 push ups and was timed in a 30-yard dash as well as the mile run. A minimum score of 30 on the ACT test is also a requirement.

Kvistad has been very active at Clark High School. A member of the National Honor Society, he is consistently on the Gold Honor Roll. He placed second in 2020, fifth in 2021 and sixth this year at the State Wrestling Tournament. He has been a member of the Clark FCCLA Quiz Bowl Team which has won two national championships and a second place finish. He qualified for state cross country on multiple occassions and is a quality baseball pitcher. Gunnar is the son of Denver and Tammy Kvistad and has an older sister, Avery.

It is Avery, who is in the military, that helped Gunnar develop his interest in applying to a military academy.

"It was in the spring of my ju-



Clark High School senior Gunnar Kvistad is given his acceptance letter from the U.S. Air Force Academy by C.H.S. principal Jennifer Heggelund. Kvistad was accepted last week to be in the Air Force Academy Class of 2026. He is the son of Denver and Tammy Kvistad.

nior year when I decided that this at Colorado Springs, followed by was what I wanted to apply for, and five years of active duty, as a 2nd when I got the call last week, it was Lt. with opportunities for advancejust kind of surreal," said Kvistad.

last fall with an interview with an admissions liasion officer. Then in December, he had three virtual interviews, all in Sioux Falls.

Then, in the middle of last week, the good news arrived.

Kvistad is planning on majoring in aerospace engineering and minoring in aviation. If he becomes an aviator, that remains to be seen.

He will be a Cadet for four years

ment. This will be followed by three The application process started years in the reserves or remaining active in the Air Force.

> Kvistad gets a jump on his schooling with a June processing date, followed by six weeks of boot

"This is a great opportunity to further my education and serve my country at an educational institution on par with any in America," Kvistad exclaimed of his acceptance

Jordyn Maynard's senior project is 'Digital Trophy Case'

senior project, she wanted former tracks in her school by building an hard!" Troubleshooting broken code up anything that happened during their high school years.

SCE, or Senior Capstone Experience, is a program designed to help students think about their future careers and explore some options, culminating in doing a project that gets them out of their comfort zone or benefits someone else, or both. When it was started several years ago it was optional, and has since become a requirement for graduation at Clark High School.

Each student picks a project early in their senior year and finds a mentor (preferably not a parent) who can give up to 15 hours of their own time to help with the project. The students have most of their senior school year to complete the project. Before graduation they present it to the SCE board consisting of a school board member, a school administration member, a community member, and their own

She's producing a work of art written in computer code. When her work is published to the website you will be able to take a virtual tour of the halls of the school and see the pictures and team member names of the various sports going back in time, possibly as far as the records go. Her plan is to have it "go live" for public access about the end of April and to give her presentation to the senior project board in early

At the time of our interview Jordyn had about 70 files of hypertext markup language (HTML) code, 11 files of cascading style sheets (CSS) code and numerous photos and other images hand-coded into her website work.

Modern web development tools could have eliminated a lot of that hand work, but she's learning what goes on behind the scenes of a website by doing it from scratch.

When Jordyn Maynard picked a Jordyn Maynard is leaving Starting out she said "This is really tudents to be able to digitally look addition to the school's website that is hard, Computers are not forgivshe calls "Digital Trophy Case". ing of typos like newspapers are. (A missing or extra "period, comma quote, or other marker in code can make the whole page go away! You can still read this page, although I left a comma out and a lone quotation mark in the previous sentence

> "After a while it becomes fun!" She adds. And you can tell she's excited about her Digital Trophy Case and the legacy she'll leave her school upon graduation this spring. Listening to her talk you can also tell she loves the code writing, too.

Gathering and putting all the data in the website takes the most time, Jordyn says, with emphasis on the editing and data input. Her instruction came from her mentor, Sam Williams and from w3schools. com, which is like the manual for writing html and other website

Said Williams about this indepth project: "When Jordyn came



Jordyn Maynard's SCE project adds an "Awards" section to the Clark School website allowing website visitors to "virtually walk the halls" and see the team pictures and trophies from years gone by. Jordyn is the daughter of Jory and Shawna Maynard.

digital trophy case for her senior Clark has so much history and

to me with the idea of creating a project, I was instantly sold on it.

walls of the school, but the only way to view them was to physically walk the hallways. For those who are not able to visit in person, Jordyn's digital trophy case will give them the opportunity to take a stroll down memory lane from the comfort of their own home. There is also a plan to have an interactive panel located in the school where visitors can interact and view awards, senior class photos, and team photos all in one place."

"It was important to Jordyn to create an elegant, yet easy to use interface for her program, so that any individual, regardless of their age or technology skills, could enjoy the experience. The way Jordyn utilized buttons, snap scrolling, and images to achieve this shows just how much time she spent in the planning and development side."

"It was a blast to work with Jordyn as she attacked this project

Jordyn Maynard (continued on page page 10)

South Dakota veteran denied benefits after exposure to toxic burn pits

South Dakota News Watch

When President Joe Biden mentioned the term "burn pits" while discussing health benefits for military veterans during his State of the Union address March 1, many Americans heard of the issue for the first time.

Congress is crafting legislation to assist post-9/11 combat veterans exposed to toxic smoke from burn pits that contractors used to dispose of human waste, chemicals, munitions and other hazardous materials in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For Jerry Somsen of Webster, S.D., who grew up dreaming of being a soldier, and who helped command a South Dakota Army National Guard battalion during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Biden's words were merely a reminder that the wounds of war can linger, even when their origin is unclear.

The 54-year-old insurance exec-

Jerry Somset of Webster, S.D., has been diagnosed with Parkinson's

disease he believes is related to his exposure to burn pits while stationed with the National Guard in Iraq, but so far he has been denied any benefits from the Veterans Administration. Photo: Stu Whitney, South Dakota News Watch.

utive started experiencing trem- returning from southern Iraq in ors in his hands a few years after 2005. The shaking soon spread to

both sides of his body and down his legs. Last year, a doctor diagnosed Somsen with Parkinson's disease, a progressive nervous system disorder, though Somsen has no family

history with the disease. Sitting at his dining room table on a recent evening with his wife Kari, a lawyer who works in Groton, Somsen's hands shook noticeably as he recounted the neurological tests and other medical appointments that so far have not led to any disability coverage for his illness from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, which only recognizes certain conditions as linked to burn pit exposure.

"I didn't have this when I went over there, and I came out knowing something was wrong," said Somsen, a Castlewood native and South Dakota State graduate who retired after 23 years of National Guard service in 2009. "I guess you could say we signed up for it, but we didn't sign up to not be protected

once we got back." Somsen is one of 16 South Dakotans on a confidential registry of veterans self-reporting symptoms of burn pit exposure, ranging in severity from nasal congestion to lung cancer. The registry is maintained by Burn Pits 360, a non-profit advocacy group that has pushed the VA to develop its own data gathering effort after Congress passed legisla-

tion in 2013. Further action in Washington will be determined through negotiations between a Democrat-favored measure in the House of Representatives and a more modest bipartisan measure that passed unanimously in the Senate. Veterans and their families continue to seek clarity on what the government can provide in terms of treatment and financial support.

"Most veterans understand that this needs to be an evidence-based

process," said U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, said in

an interview with News Watch. Johnson voted against the House bill but supports the Senate effort. "They understand that it takes some time to get the science figured out, but what they don't like is when political fights or bureaucracy slows down the delivery of the science," he said.

Back in Webster, as Somsen and his wife look through photographs of his 14 months in Kuwait and Iraq, they lament the frustration of seeing a once-healthy husband and father in the grip of a debilitating disease, with little relief in sight.

"We trust these (veterans) with our lives and with national security," Kari Somsen said. "But when it comes to him saying, 'Look I have this issue and I believe it came

> **Toxic Burn Pits** (continued on page page 3)